

# Review of Research

## Overview

*Steps to Respect: A Bullying Prevention Program* is an effective tool that educators can use to decrease bullying at school and help students build more supportive relationships with each other (Frey et al., 2005). The program's dual focus on bullying and friendship is based on research showing that friendship protects children from the harmful effects of bullying (Hodges, Boivin, Vitaro, and Bukowski, 1999). Students learn a variety of relationship skills, including strategies for making and keeping friends and steps for joining a group activity. The *Steps to Respect* program also teaches children skills for coping with bullying, including recognizing bullying, using assertive behaviors to respond to bullying, and reporting bullying to adults. Because many children become involved as bystanders to bullying (in both helpful and harmful ways), the *Steps to Respect* program emphasizes that all members of a school community must take responsibility for decreasing bullying.

Student lessons teach empathy for bullied children, positive social norms, and specific socially responsive behaviors for children to use when they witness bullying. In keeping with a focus on positive youth development, children have opportunities to practice problem-solving and emotion-management skills. Staff training, which increases adult awareness of and ability to respond effectively to bullying, is a central component of the program. By addressing factors at the individual-child, peer-group, and school levels, the *Steps to Respect* program provides schoolwide support and strategies for bullying reduction. This comprehensive prevention strategy has received scientific support in previous studies (Olweus, 1991; Smith and Sharp, 1994) and served as the basis for the development of the *Steps to Respect* program.

Bullying has far-reaching implications for children's emotional well-being and general school safety. Worldwide research conducted over the past two decades has added significantly to our knowledge about the harmful consequences of bullying. There is a clear negative impact on the development of both children who are the targets of bullying and those who bully others. At the same time, scientific evidence shows that the *Steps to Respect* program can have a positive impact on this difficult problem (Frey et al., 2005; Hirschstein and Frey, 2006). This review provides a summary of research on bullying, with a particular emphasis on elements that influenced the conceptualization and development of the *Steps to Respect* program.

# Understanding Bullying

## What Is Bullying?

Defining *bullying* and distinguishing it from rough play or disagreements between friends is an important focus of the *Steps to Respect* program. People of all ages experience conflict in relationships with others; hence, distinguishing bullying from normal conflict is an important skill for children and adults to master. Teachers, in particular, need efficient ways of identifying bullying since they must respond quickly to a wide variety of problems among children.

Research suggests that adults tend to confuse aggression and play fighting in children. A study looking at lunchtime supervisors' ability to distinguish play fighting, or "rough-and-tumble play," from true aggression in children found that they were more likely to err in the direction of labeling aggression as play rather than the other way around (Boulton, 1996). In order to intervene effectively, adults need to be able to discriminate play from true aggression. The following indicators provide guidance (Boulton, 1991; Boulton, 1996; Pellegrini, 1995; Smith and Boulton, 1990):

- Positive and neutral facial expressions are more typical of rough-and-tumble play, while negative facial expressions characterize aggression.
- Children are free to choose to participate in rough-and-tumble play, but they are often forced or challenged to participate in aggression.
- Children tend not to use full force in rough-and-tumble play, whereas full force is often seen in aggression.
- Children are more likely to alternate roles (for example, chased and chaser) in rough-and-tumble play, while aggression generally involves unilateral roles.
- Children tend to stay together after a bout of play fighting, but they often separate following aggression.

Normal conflict is another important behavior to distinguish from bullying. Arguments about rules and fairness are common childhood conflicts that need not escalate into aggressive or abusive behavior. There are several distinguishing features of bullying, according to most experts in the field (Atlas and Pepler, 1998; Craig and Pepler, 1999; Hazler, 1996; Olweus, 1993; Salmivalli, Huttunen, and Lagerspetz, 1997):

- Bullying involves a power imbalance in which the child doing the bullying has more power due to such factors as age, size, support of the peer group, or higher status.
- Bullying is carried out with intent to harm the targeted child.
- Bullying includes physical aggression, verbal insults, spreading malicious rumors or gossip, and threatening exclusion from the peer group.
- Bullying is usually a repeated activity in which a particular child is singled out more than once and often in a chronic manner.

The *Steps to Respect* program provides children with the following definition of *bullying*:

*Bullying* is unfair and one-sided. It happens when someone keeps hurting, frightening, threatening, or leaving someone out on purpose.

This definition is used throughout the program to help children recognize bullying and distinguish it from other problems they might have with peers.

## **What Does Bullying Look Like?**

Bullying can be expressed directly or indirectly (Olweus, 1993). It may have sexual content, especially in the late-elementary and middle school years. It is common for children to experience more than one type of bullying, so children need different skills to recognize and cope with the different forms. The *Steps to Respect* program teaches children to recognize direct ("face-to-face") and indirect ("behind-the-back") bullying and provides ways to cope with each type.

### **Direct Bullying**

When children and adults are asked to define *bullying*, they usually describe direct bullying. Direct bullying is characterized by open attacks on the targeted child, including physical and verbal aggression. In cases of direct bullying, both the child being bullied and others in the environment are likely to know the identity of the person(s) doing the bullying. Direct physical bullying is the easiest form to recognize because it is the only type of bullying with overtly observable signs of damage (for example, physical injury and torn or dirty clothing). Examples of direct bullying include:

- Causing physical harm or threats.
- Insulting, taunting, or engaging in name-calling.
- Telling a child to his or her face in a mean way that she or he cannot play.

### **Indirect Bullying**

Indirect bullying is more difficult to recognize and respond to because the person being bullied may not be present when the bullying happens and/or may not know the identity of the child doing the bullying. The primary purpose of indirect bullying is social exclusion or damaging a child's reputation or status within the peer group. Examples of indirect bullying include:

- Spreading malicious rumors or lies about a child.
- Writing hurtful graffiti about a child.
- Encouraging others not to play with a particular child.

Researchers studying aggressive behavior in children describe these relationship-damaging behaviors as "relational aggression" (Crick and Grotpeter, 1995). When measures of relational aggression are included in studies, girls are found to engage in higher rates of aggression than is commonly thought (Crick and Grotpeter, 1995). In fact, people are often surprised to learn that observations of children's behavior show that girls bully as much as boys do (Atlas and Pepler, 1998).

### Sexual Bullying

Sexual bullying occurs when one student is targeted by another with unwanted words, actions, or media images about sex. Examples of sexual bullying include:

- Making unwanted jokes, comments, or taunts about sexual body parts.
- Teasing about sexual orientation or starting rumors about sexual activities.
- Passing unwanted notes or pictures about sex.
- Engaging in physically intrusive behaviors, such as brushing up against someone or grabbing someone in a sexual way or forcing someone to engage in unwanted sexual behaviors.

Sexual harassment and sexual bullying both involve behavior that is unwelcome and attempts to exploit a power differential between the perpetrator and victim (McMaster, Connolly, Pepler, and Craig, 1997). The term “sexual harassment” is used more frequently in legal contexts. In 1993, the American Association of University Women (AAUW) conducted a landmark survey on children’s experiences of sexual harassment at school. Findings from this large-scale survey reveal that sexual harassment is a common occurrence at school for both boys and girls, across grade levels. Another study of fifth- to eighth-graders found that 40 percent experienced sexual harassment by peers at school (McMaster, Connolly, Pepler, and Craig, 1997).

American children are provided legal protection from sexual harassment at school under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. The U.S. Supreme Court decided that schools can be held financially liable for disregarding student complaints of sexual harassment (*Davis v. Monroe County Board of Education*, 1999).

Based on research showing that sexual bullying is a salient issue for students as early as the elementary grades, the *Steps to Respect* program addresses sexual bullying at Level 3 of the curriculum. Discussing sexual harassment in the context of bullying is recommended as a useful way to address this important topic with elementary students in an age-appropriate manner (Stein, 1995). The *Steps to Respect* program offers two ways of teaching this material: One option discusses sexual bullying behaviors in general bullying terms without using the term “sexual harassment;” a second supplementary section defines *sexual harassment* and specifically links bullying and sexual harassment. At all levels of the curriculum, the *Steps to Respect* program emphasizes that children should always report bullying involving private body parts to an adult immediately.

## How Widespread Is the Problem?

### What Children Say

Children themselves have provided some of the most troubling data regarding bullying. A survey of 85 percent of Norwegian elementary and junior high school students found that 15 percent reported involvement in bullying on a regular basis (Olweus, 1993). About 7 percent of students regularly bullied others, and 9 percent were frequent targets of bullying. Children's reports of bully/victim problems from many different countries reveal rates comparable to or higher than the Norwegian sample (Smith et al., 1999). A survey of British adolescents indicated that 21 to 27 percent of the sample was targeted regularly (Whitney and Smith, 1993). Canadian research has estimated the rate of bullying to be approximately 20 percent (Ziegler and Pepler, 1993).

A study of third- through sixth-grade school children in the United States revealed that 10 percent experienced chronic victimization (Perry, Kusel, and Perry, 1988). A recent study of American fifth graders found that 18 percent of the sample was targeted regularly (Pellegrini, Bartini, and Brooks, 1999). A study of nearly 16,000 secondary school students found that 30 percent reported moderate or frequent involvement in bullying, 13 percent solely as perpetrator, 10.6 percent solely as victim, and 6.3 percent as both (Nansel et al., 2001). More students in sixth and seventh grades reported being targeted (22 percent) than students in ninth and tenth grades (12 percent). In addition, almost all children have experienced occasional bullying or seen others being bullied, which can lead to fear of becoming a regular target.

Supplementing the reports of young people, playground observations in the U.S. indicate that a majority of third- to sixth-grade children occasionally engage in bullying behavior that targets someone who is younger, less powerful, or of lower social status (Frey et al., 2005). For some children, this may represent some "experimentation" with domineering, antisocial behavior. One of the objectives of the *Steps to Respect* program is to reduce rewards for such behavior, thereby discouraging development of more serious problems.

## Are There Harmful Consequences?

Sometimes adults have viewed bullying as a passing stage of childhood or as a problem that children should be left to work out on their own. These beliefs are refuted by much evidence that shows harmful and often long-lasting effects for children who bully, those who are bullied, and those who witness bullying incidents.

### For Children Who Bully

Some children who bully may have leadership potential with peers, but their reliance on negative ways of influencing others keeps them from developing this potential. As their peers mature, children who bully may experience a decline in their peer-group status. In turn, declines in social status may

lead to increased association with others who have aggressive behavior problems, a pattern that can contribute to the development of adolescent gangs (Cairns, Cairns, Neckerman, Gest, and Gariepy, 1988).

The tendency to associate with like-minded peers may have implications for romantic partners as well. Young people who bully initiate dating relationships earlier than other young people, have less positive views of their relationships, and are more likely to be involved in dating violence (Connolly, Pepler, Craig, and Taradash, 2000).

The risk of drug involvement (Pepler, Craig, Connolly, and Henderson, 2002), tobacco and alcohol use, and poor school adjustment (Nansel et al., 2001) is higher among young people who bully than among those who don't. Those who bully are also more involved in street crime and more likely to suffer violent injuries as a result (Andershed, Kerr, and Stattin, 2001).

For some children, the aggressive behavior that takes the form of bullying in childhood persists into adulthood (Eron, Huessmann, Dubow, Romanoff, and Yarmel, 1987). In a follow-up study of children who bullied, Olweus (1991) found that 60 percent of the boys identified as having serious bullying problems between sixth and ninth grade had at least one criminal conviction by age 24, and 40 percent of them had three or more arrests. Only 10 percent of the group of boys who did not engage in bullying behavior had criminal records as adults. Follow-up studies in the United States reveal similar results (Eron, Huessmann, Dubow, Romanoff, and Yarmel, 1987).

## **For Children Who Are Bullied**

Peer victimization predicts immediate and long-term problems with academic, social, and emotional functioning.

### **Academic Problems**

Children who are bullied develop negative attitudes about school as early as kindergarten (Kochenderfer and Ladd, 1996). Later, victimization is associated with declines in academic performance (Schwartz and Gorman, 2003) and school attendance (Slee, 1994), with an increase in truancy and school dropout (Sharp, 1995). Further, nearly 25 percent of American teenagers report not wanting to attend school, staying home, or skipping a class as a result of sexual bullying by peers (AAUW, 1993).

### **Social Problems**

Bullying may result in severe ostracization of the targeted child by peers. Children tend to judge targeted children quite negatively and blame them for the bullying they endure (Oliver, Hoover, and Hazler, 1994). Peers apply negative labels such as "weak" and "nerdy" to targeted children (Charach, Pepler, and Ziegler, 1995), and they show little empathy for them (Perry, Williard, and Perry, 1990). These findings suggest that being bullied can lead to further peer rejection and the development of a painful cycle in which the children who are most in need of support from their peers are the least likely to receive it.

Ironically, children's experiences as victims provide explicit tutoring in the techniques and rewards of aggression. Increased aggression on the part of victims is a frequent result (Huesmann and Eron, 1984). Playground observations indicate that children are likely to respond in kind when targeted for aggression (Pepler, Craig, and Roberts, 1998). Children who are bullied have more behavior problems after the onset of bullying, and those problems get worse over time (Schwartz, McFayden-Ketchum, Dodge, Pettit, and Bates, 1998). The consequences of bullying appear to be most serious for young people involved as both aggressors and victims (Nansel et al., 2001; Perry, Hodges, and Egan, 2001).

### **Emotional Problems**

Being the target of peer aggression has been shown to lead to emotional problems in children as young as preschool- (Crick, Casas, and Ku, 1999) and kindergarten-age (Kochenderfer and Ladd, 1996). Feelings of self-worth decline in children who are bullied (Grills and Ollendick, 2002). There is ample evidence of links between chronic victimization and adjustment problems such as aggression, anxiety, depression, and self-inflicted violence (see Hawker and Boulton, 2000, for a meta-analytic review).

It is not simply the case that children with emotional problems are bullied more. The experience of being bullied itself leads to more adjustment problems (Egan and Perry, 1998; Hanish and Guerra, 2002; Kochenderfer and Ladd, 1997). These children begin to blame themselves for the bullying and may see themselves as social failures (Graham and Juvonen, 1998). These harmful emotional consequences have been found to extend into adulthood in the form of lower self-esteem and increased risk of depression (Olweus, 1993). A connection has also been found between experiencing sexual harassment at school and the later development of mental health difficulties (McMaster, Connolly, Pepler, and Craig, 1998).

### **For Children Who Witness Bullying**

Present during 85 percent of bullying episodes (Craig and Pepler, 1995), bystanders are arguably the largest group of students affected by bullying. When children repeatedly witness successful domination and abuse of others, they learn that disrespectful behavior, intimidation, and cruelty may bring rewards. The experience may encourage imitation and a climate of fear.

Children report feeling guilty and uncomfortable when witnessing bullying (Charach, Pepler, and Ziegler, 1995). Others confess to confusion about what they should do about it (Hazler, 1996). This may explain why children rarely intervene, even though such efforts tend to halt bullying quickly (Craig, Pepler, and Atlas, 2000). Some researchers have expressed concern that repeated inaction in the face of cruelty to others may lead children to "disengage" their moral compass (Bandura, 2002) and passively accept the injustices typical of bullying (Jeffrey, Miller, and Linn, 2001).

In addition to the impact bullying has among individual children, its costs to schools and communities are substantial. Evidence suggests that students' victimization by bullying may have contributed to previous school shootings (Leary, Kowalski, Smith, and Phillips, 2003), prompting legislation to address school bullying in at least fifteen states (Limber and Small, 2003). Although

this is an excellent beginning, such efforts are likely to miss the mark unless the resulting initiatives include strong implementation of comprehensive programs that are grounded in theory and empirical evidence (Furlong, Morrison, and Grief, 2003).

## Solutions to the Problem

Adults who have tackled the problem by leading anti-bullying efforts in their schools have had a positive impact. Evaluations of the *Steps to Respect* program and important nationwide anti-bullying efforts in Norway and England have shown reductions in bullying, more positive student attitudes toward school (Olweus 1991), increased student willingness to seek help (Smith and Sharp, 1994), and less tolerant attitudes toward bullying (Frey et al., 2005). The Norwegian and English efforts showed that schools with the largest reductions in bullying were those with the most thorough and consistent program implementation (Eslea and Smith, 1998; Roland, 2000).

Experts on bullying have emphasized strongly the importance of mobilizing the entire school in the effort against bullying, with specific components at the school, class, and individual levels (Espelage and Swearer, 2003; Olweus, 1991, 1993; Pepler, Craig, and O'Connell, 1999). The *Steps to Respect* program, like other programs shown to be effective in reducing bullying (for example, Olweus, 1991; Smith and Sharp, 1994), starts with establishing a schoolwide environment that limits the rewards students derive from bullying and motivates greater social responsibility. Elements that are crucial to improving the school environment include:

- Establishing clear rules and procedures about bullying.
- Training adults in the school to respond sensitively and consistently to bullying.
- Training adults to increase support for socially responsible student behavior.
- Improving adult supervision, particularly in less-structured areas such as the playground and lunchroom.
- Improving parental awareness and involvement in working on the problem.

## Don't Adults Already Help?

Adults are largely unaware of the magnitude of their school's bullying problem. Many children endure chronic bullying in silence, without assistance from adults. One study found that only 47 percent of bullied primary-school students told a teacher about the bullying (Ziegler and Pepler, 1993). Furthermore, children believe that teachers will not respond effectively, if they respond at all. In Norway, 40 percent of students in the primary grades and 60 percent of junior high students reported that teachers intervened to stop bullying "only once in a while or never" (Olweus, 1993). A study of middle school and high school students in the U.S. found that 60 percent of students who were bullied felt that school staff responded poorly (Hoover, Oliver, and Hazler, 1992). Parents also tend to be unaware of children's struggles with bullying and are unlikely to address the issue with them (Olweus, 1993).

Without reports from children, school staff find it difficult to monitor for bullying effectively, since bullying tends to occur in less-supervised areas of the school (Smith, 1991). Hence, adult

awareness of bullying is lowered both by its covert nature and by children's reluctance to ask for help. Observational research of bullying paints an alarming picture of adult intervention. Teachers showed limited awareness of bullying incidents, even when they occurred in the classroom, and were found to intervene in only 18 percent of cases (Atlas and Pepler, 1998). Worse yet, adults appear to overestimate the extent to which they intervene in bullying. This possibility is suggested by a study that found 70 percent of teachers and only 25 percent of students said adults "almost always" intervene to stop bullying (Charach, Pepler, and Ziegler, 1995). Adults' tendency to mislabel aggression as play could also contribute to their low intervention rates (Boulton, 1996). Unfortunately, the longer bullying is allowed to continue due to lack of adult awareness and intervention, the greater the likelihood that children's worst fears regarding the hopelessness of the situation will be confirmed. Improved training of school staff is a crucial part of responding to bullying (O'Moore, 2000).

A major aim of the *Steps to Respect* program is to counteract children's negative views regarding their ability to get help. This critical objective is emphasized throughout the program in the following ways: (1) Changing the environment of the whole school by intervening at levels beyond the individual child (school, classroom, and peer group); (2) training adults to recognize bullying and respond effectively to children's reports of it; and (3) teaching children when and how to report bullying to adults.

### **How Do the Classroom Curricula Affect Individuals and the Peer Group?**

In addition to the schoolwide environmental intervention, the *Steps to Respect* program provides classroom lessons and instructional practices designed for use in grades 3–5 or 4–6. These lessons target motivational factors in bullying and social-emotional skills needed to impede bullying and promote healthy, friendly relationships. The focus on this age group reflects a developmental strategy of intervening prior to age-typical increases in the amount and sophistication of bullying (Pelligrini and Long, 2002) and attitudes that support bullying (Charach, Pepler, and Ziegler, 1995). Normative beliefs about the acceptability of aggression also stabilize during this period and become increasingly resistant to subsequent change (Huesmann and Guerra, 1997). Thus, this may be a particularly favorable time to influence bullying-related beliefs, skills, and behaviors among the entire peer group (Charach, Pepler, and Ziegler, 1995).

## **What Skills Help Children Cope with Bullying?**

### **Specific Coping Skills**

#### **Assertiveness**

Teaching children coping strategies to use when they are faced with bullying is another step toward solving the problem. Research shows that the way children respond to bullying has an effect on the outcome. When children respond aggressively, the bullying tends to last longer or get worse, which can lead to a greater risk of physical harm (Kochenderfer and Ladd, 1997; Wilton, Craig, and Pepler, 2000).

In contrast, when children use problem-solving strategies, such as standing up for themselves assertively, it tends to end sooner. Studies have also shown that, in comparison to non-targeted children, targeted children are more likely to reward bullying behavior by giving in, crying easily, failing to defend themselves, and, in general, responding passively and non-assertively (Hodges, Boivin, Vitaro, and Bukowski, 1999; Olweus, 1993; Perry, Williard, and Perry, 1990; Schwartz, Dodge, and Coie, 1993). The lack of self-confidence experienced by children who are frequent targets of bullying increases the likelihood that they will respond ineffectively, unless they are provided with better strategies and the opportunity to practice them. The *Steps to Respect* program teaches children to manage their emotions and respond assertively when they are subjected to bullying. Skill-practice activities provide frequent opportunities for practice. The *Steps to Respect* program emphasizes that children should report bullying to an adult even when they have stopped it successfully. Therefore, it is equally important that adults in the school undergo training in responding to bullying in order to support and reinforce children's use of newly acquired skills.

Assertiveness skills are also important for bystanders who choose not to join in with peers who are bullying. It takes courage to refuse to "join the crowd" or to speak out on behalf of a bullying target. Bystanders rarely intervene, even though such intervention is typically very effective at stopping bullying (Craig and Pepler, 1995). The confusion children experience when they witness bullying further reduces the possibility that they will act responsibly (Hazler, 1996).

### **Emotion Management**

Emotion management skills are a basic building block of assertive behavior. A successful response to bullying requires a calm, strong delivery, even if a child is not feeling all that confident. Responsible bystander behavior may also be sidetracked by strong negative reactions to bullying. If children are upset enough by witnessed bullying, they will channel their efforts into comforting themselves rather than helping others (Eisenberg, Wentzel, and Harris, 1998; Snell, MacKenzie, and Frey, 2002). Practicing self-regulatory techniques and specific anti-bullying strategies may help students act in socially responsible ways.

Many children who are victimized and rejected by peers have difficulty regulating their emotions. Using self-talk to get calm and respond assertively may help children avoid "out-of-control" responses typical of "easy" targets (Kochenderfer and Ladd, 1997; Schwartz, Dodge, and Coie, 1993). Many of these children are involved in bullying as both perpetrators and victims, operating aggressively in either case (Schwartz, 2000). These children may be more accepted socially and provide less "entertainment" for their tormentors if they learn to redirect heated retaliation into calm, assertive responses.

### **Friendship and Other Social Skills**

The *Steps to Respect* program also teaches children relationship skills to buffer them from the harmful effects of bullying. Children's friendships serve many important developmental functions, including social support, companionship, and practice for future relationships (Hartup, 1993; Newcomb and Bagwell, 1996). Rejection by peers is related to multiple negative outcomes such as school dropout, relationship difficulties later in life, and mental health problems (Cowen, Pederson, Babigian, Izzo,

and Trost, 1973; Parker and Asher, 1993). As early as kindergarten, children who are accepted by peers and have more friends at the beginning of the school year show more improvement in academic achievement and enjoyment of school than other children in their classes (Ladd, Kochenderfer, and Coleman, 1997).

Research shows that friendship plays an important role both in preventing bullying and in helping children cope once it has occurred. For instance, children with at least one friend are less likely to be bullied (Hodges, Malone, and Perry, 1997). Having a best friend protects children who have been bullied from continued bullying. It also decreases the harmful effects of bullying. Children who are bullied show fewer emotional and behavioral problems afterward if they have a best friend (Hodges, Boivin, Vitaro, and Bukowski, 1999).

The themes that emerge when considering friendship also reflect important themes in the dynamics of bullying: power, respect, and caring about others. Although bullying involves the unfair use of power to harm another person, friendship is based on equality, reciprocity, and concern for the other's well-being (Hartup, 1996). In the *Steps to Respect* program, children practice skills that help them make friends (for example, conversing, discovering shared interests, and showing appreciation). The *Steps to Respect* program teaches children to maintain friendships by being agreeable, trustworthy, and forgiving when misunderstandings occur (Asher, Parker, and Walker, 1996). Children also practice managing disagreements fairly, without harming the relationship.

Of course, not all friendships display such positive characteristics. Children often feel lonely and are more likely to avoid school if their friendships are non-supportive and conflict-ridden (Ladd, Kochenderfer, and Coleman, 1996; Parker and Asher, 1987). The *Steps to Respect* program teaches children how to deal with friends who do not treat them with fairness, caring, and respect. It also provides children with strategies to use if they encounter pressure from friends to bully others.

Children's ability to join a group is another skill that is important for success with peers (Putallaz and Gottman, 1981; Putallaz and Wasserman, 1990). It may also reduce bullying, since children who spend more time alone on the playground are more frequent targets. The *Steps to Respect* program teaches effective group-entry strategies (for example, observing the group and asking questions about its activity instead of attempting to change it). The *Steps to Respect* program also teaches children how to manage their hurt feelings when they are rebuffed so they do not behave in ways that make it more likely that peers will reject them in the future (for example, using positive self-talk and looking for another activity instead of insulting or threatening group members). Research indicates programs that include social-skills coaching, practice, feedback, and self-reflection can increase children's social competence, acceptance by peers, and number of friendships (Asher and Rose, 1997).

## **The Limits of Skills**

Some children who bully lack social skills, and others appear to be highly "skilled manipulators" (Kaukiainen et al., 2002). In working with educators during an evaluation of the *Steps to Respect* program (Frey et al., 2005), playground observers found that teachers were much more aware of

bullying perpetrated by poorly regulated, disruptive students than they were of bullying perpetrated by "good students." Strong social skills (for example, perspective-taking, leadership) probably helped these students avoid detection and choose effective strategies for harassing classmates. What they lacked was the motivation to treat their classmates with respect and caring, a motivation that is often stimulated by feelings of empathy.

### The Power of Shared Norms and Beliefs

Descriptive work on bullying provides ample evidence of the powerful beliefs that accompany bullying behavior. Studies reveal a distinct lack of empathy for victims (Endresen and Olweus, 2001; Pelligrini and Long, 2002) and the belief that bullying a target who is considered irritating or "somehow weird" is justified (Oliver, Hoover, and Hazler, 1994; Rigby and Slee, 1991).

Shared antisocial beliefs contribute to a peer climate that tacitly or overtly condones bullying and discourages responsible bystander behavior. Denial of victim-harm by labeling bullying as "just fun and games" enables children to view bullying as a legitimate way to alleviate boredom (Rigby and Slee, 1991; Terasahjo and Salmivalli, 2003). Although those who bully express such rationalizations frequently, many bystanders (Hara, 2002) and even targets eventually subscribe to these beliefs (Graham and Juvonen, 1998).

Other beliefs may affect the motivation to bully. The belief that adults rarely intervene (Olweus, 1993; Hoover, Oliver, and Hazler, 1992), for example, may lead students to conclude that they can bully with impunity. A significant number of children believe that aggression generally leads to positive outcomes (Perry, Perry, and Rasmussen, 1986). Indeed, peers are more friendly and respectful toward those who bully (Craig and Pepler, 1995), a group that includes many popular students (Rodkin and Hodges, 2003).

### The Power of the Peer Group: Why Is Changing Bystander Behavior Important?

Children's classmates are the most frequent bystanders to bullying. Changing the way bystanders respond to bullying is a critical part of the solution.

Children's peer groups have a significant influence on bullying. One reason is that bullying often is kept from the eyes of adults. Children also tend to look to other children for cues about how to respond to bullying (Salmivalli, Huttunen, and Lagerspetz, 1997). Unfortunately, many ways in which children respond to bullying make the situation worse. For instance, providing an audience for the behavior by standing around and watching or laughing can encourage and prolong the bullying (Craig and Pepler, 1995; Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, Bjorkqvist, Osterman, and Kaukiainen, 1996). Live observations of bullying by Canadian researchers showed that peers were present in 85 percent of bullying episodes. In 81 percent of these cases, other children reinforced the bullying by providing attention or actually joining in the aggression (Craig and Pepler, 1995). In contrast, peers only intervened to stop the bullying in 11 percent of cases.

Despite these findings, there is evidence that watching bullying is a distressing experience for most children (Charach, Pepler, and Ziegler, 1995). Leading bullying researchers Debra Pepler and Wendy Craig recommend approaches that can help students translate this discomfort into socially responsible behavior by changing peer-group attitudes, behaviors, and norms about bullying (1995). The *Steps to Respect* program does this by (1) promoting development of empathy for children who are bullied; (2) fostering socially responsible goals; (3) improving children's recognition of bullying and their role in the problem; and (4) teaching skills and strategies children can use to be "part of the solution" instead of "part of the problem."

### **How Effective Is the *Steps to Respect* Program at Reducing Bullying and Promoting Positive Social Interaction?**

A rigorous evaluation study determined that an initial implementation of the *Steps to Respect* program resulted in approximately 25 percent fewer bullying events than would otherwise be expected (Frey et al., 2005). In this effort, six elementary schools were randomly assigned to either the intervention or control group. Playground observations were collected in the fall and spring, along with surveys of student skills and attitudes identified as factors in bullying and victimization. Following staff training, intervention schools created bullying policies and implemented the classroom curricula twice a week for approximately twelve weeks.

### **Teacher Implementation Efforts**

Several analyses showed improvements in teachers' awareness and responses to bullying. Following staff training, teachers in implementation schools reported feeling more prepared to tackle bullying problems than their counterparts in control schools did. Teachers' monthly reports of their efforts to support students outside of the lessons indicated that intervention teachers were more likely than control teachers to prompt the use of specific anti-bullying skills "in the moment." Intervention teachers also showed a marginally significant increase in student coaching following a bullying incident after the start of program implementation (Hirschstein and Frey, 2006).

### **Bullying Behavior**

Coders who were blind to school experimental condition observed a random subsample of 612 third-to sixth-grade students. Changes in playground behavior from fall to spring revealed that bullying increased in the control, but not the intervention schools. Control schools also experienced a marginally significant increase in bystander encouragement of bullying. Estimates indicate that students in each intervention classroom experienced approximately 800 fewer bullying events between March and mid-June as a result of implementing the *Steps to Respect* program.

### **Social Skills and Behavior**

More than a thousand students completed surveys in class and were rated by teachers. Fifth- and sixth-grade intervention students reported more ease responding assertively to bullying events

than control students. There were no intervention-control differences in teacher ratings of student social competence, perhaps reflecting teachers' restricted opportunities to witness peer interaction. Observations of general social behavior, however, showed that students in the intervention schools became more agreeable and less argumentative (boys, in particular) during interactions with classmates relative to students in control schools.

### Attitudes Related to Bullying

After program implementation, intervention students reported less tolerance of bullying and aggression than their control counterparts. They also felt a stronger sense of personal responsibility to reduce bullying, indicating that they would tell friends to stop bullying others. Finally, students receiving the program perceived adults in their schools as more responsive to bullying problems than did control students. With each of these beliefs, students in control schools became more negative over the school year, indicating a true "prevention effect" among intervention schools.

This randomized control trial is the first to find changes in playground bullying, as documented by observers who did not know which schools were program participants. It places those changes in the context of student social skills, normative beliefs, and perceptions of adult support.

In line with research showing teachers to be key agents of change (Kallestad and Olweus, 2003), analyses currently underway indicate that teacher efforts to apply *Steps to Respect* lessons to everyday problems predict improved playground behavior and more positive student attitudes (Edstrom, Hirschstein, Frey, Snell, and MacKenzie, 2004). Lesson quality and completeness also appear to be important factors in program success.

## Summary

Bullying is a serious problem for school-age children and one for which they receive limited adult help. There are clear, harmful bullying effects on the development of large numbers of children. Not only is emotional adjustment affected, but bullying also has a devastating effect on children's ability to focus on academics at school. Several variables have limited adult awareness of the problem, including the hidden nature of bullying, the fact that children are reluctant to report bullying, and the existence of several common misperceptions about bullying (for example, "S/he'll grow out of it," "Boys will be boys," or "Just ignore it"). Telling children to "just fight back" is a particularly damaging form of advice because it can lead to bullying getting worse or lasting longer (Kochenderfer and Ladd, 1997; Wilton, Craig, and Pepler, 2000). In fact, bullying is a complex, distressing problem for children that requires intervention on multiple levels.

Information is now available to guide schools in responding sensitively and effectively to bullying. Consistent with research, the *Steps to Respect* program provides strategies to reduce bullying at the individual-child, peer-group, and schoolwide levels (Olweus, 1991; Smith and Sharp, 1994). Student lessons teach friendship skills and ways to cope with bullying. Children are also taught to become

responsible bystanders to bullying by refusing to join in or by reporting the bullying to an adult. The adult training component of the *Steps to Respect* program is at least as important as the student lessons. Active adult involvement is necessary to right the power imbalance inherent to bullying and bring about the schoolwide changes needed to reduce bullying (Olweus, 1991; Smith and Sharp, 1994).

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# Program Overview

*Steps to Respect: A Bullying Prevention Program* promotes a whole-school approach to bullying by addressing factors at the school, staff, family, individual-child, and peer-group levels. Intervening at multiple levels is the most effective way to reduce school bullying (see the Review of Research, page 22). The *Steps to Respect* program involves fostering a respectful school culture, developing school policies and procedures, staff training, student skill development, and communication with families. The program consists of schoolwide, staff, family, and student components.

## Schoolwide Components

At the foundation of a school's bullying prevention efforts is a safe, caring, respectful culture. An essential part of the *Steps to Respect* program is fostering such a culture and developing the policies and procedures to support it. Before curriculum lessons are taught, it is necessary to have systems in place so that when children make bullying reports, they receive a timely and appropriate response from adults. Many schools choose to establish the schoolwide framework in the spring so it is in place for the start of the new school year in the fall.

Committee for Children recommends that schools establish a steering team to guide the schoolwide bullying prevention efforts. With a steering team, the work can be shared by a number of people, completed in a timely and effective manner, and sustained over time. Leadership by both school administrators and the steering team is vital.

This Program Guide contains a program implementation section with specific information and guidance on establishing the schoolwide framework necessary for bullying prevention. It includes worksheets that suggest step-by-step tasks. The information and worksheets are designed to guide a steering team through the process of developing the framework and systems that can sustain bullying prevention efforts. (See the Program Implementation Section, pages 43–89.)

This Program Guide also has an extensive resource section (pages 91–141) with 22 different resources specifically designed to assist in establishing the schoolwide framework and support the step-by-step tasks suggested in the Program Implementation section.

## Staff Components

Research shows that children who are bullied rarely tell adults about it. They tend to think that adults can't or won't do anything to help. In the *Steps to Respect* program, children learn that they can trust adults and that they should report bullying to them. All adults at the school are trained to

understand the dynamics of bullying and how to receive and respond effectively to reports of bullying. One training session—the All-Staff Training—is intended for use with *all* adults in the school. Volunteers, custodial staff, office staff, playground monitors, bus drivers, aides, and classroom and special class teachers participate in the training. In subsequent sessions, designated staff members learn and practice specific skills for responding to bullying reports and coaching students involved in bullying situations. Additionally, a curriculum orientation for classroom instructors provides valuable information about the classroom lessons.

## **Staff Training**

The successful implementation of the *Steps to Respect* program depends on well-trained staff. The *Steps to Respect* staff training is user-friendly. Training scripts are intended to be presented by the school principal and/or a member of the school staff who is comfortable with leading training for his or her peers. The six and a half-hour training can be conducted in one day or split into smaller sessions of three hours, one and a half hours, and two hours.

The staff training consists of four segments. The initial training, consisting of the All-Staff Training, the Coaching Training, and the Curriculum Orientation, should be conducted early in the school year—before teaching any *Steps to Respect* student materials. Booster Sessions follow later in the year.

### **All-Staff Training**

This segment lasts three hours and precedes the Coaching Training and Curriculum Orientation. It provides a basic overview of the *Steps to Respect* program, information about bullying, and training in receiving bullying reports from students. Later, in the classroom skill lessons, children will learn that every adult at school is a safe person to talk to about bullying. Thus, all staff should attend this training, including teachers, aides, specialists, playground monitors, janitors, and office personnel; in other words, any adult in the school who has contact with students and who potentially could receive a student's initial bullying report.

### **Coaching Training**

This segment lasts an hour and a half. It is designed for staff members who will be coaching children who have bullied or who have been targets of bullying. The recommended participants for this segment are all classroom teachers, counselors, and building administrators. The Coaching Training should be done after participants have completed the All-Staff Training.

### **Curriculum Orientation**

This segment is two hours long. It is an exploration of the classroom curriculum materials for those teachers presenting the student skill and literature units. This orientation can be held either before or after the Coaching Training has been conducted.

### **Booster Trainings**

These are four short follow-up pieces developed to be used after the initial staff training. The first three, which last about 15–30 minutes each, are designed for use in staff or faculty meetings within

the first one to two months after the staff training to provide extra support for all staff members as they implement the *Steps to Respect* program.

The fourth booster session takes about 30 minutes. It is meant to be used at the end of the school year as a tool for evaluating the overall implementation of the program. It also can be used each year to monitor ongoing *Steps to Respect* implementation.

For more information on training, see Program Implementation, Step 3, “Roll-Out Planning,” on page 77.

## **Family Components**

A two-hour family overview presentation provides information about the skills and values children learn in the *Steps to Respect* program and ways families can support their children in dealing with bullying. Additional family contact is made through a series of family handouts included with the student skill lessons.

For more information on involving families, see Program Implementation, Step 3, “Informing and Involving Families,” on page 82.

## **Student Components**

Embedded in the instructional design of the student curriculum lessons are activities that foster social-emotional competence, academic skills, and positive social values. Documentation of how the *Steps to Respect* program aligns with academic content standards and character education is available from Committee for Children. For more detailed information about the skills taught in the skill and literature lessons, see Resources A and B on pages 91 and 92.

### **Skills Addressed**

#### **Social-Emotional Competence**

Core competencies such as emotional intelligence, self-management, and social skills provide a base for positive values and responsible actions (Elias et al., 1997). For example, empathy for another person can motivate bystanders to behave responsibly when someone is bullied. Decision-making, emotion-management, and communication skills enable students to act on good intentions safely and effectively. The *Steps to Respect* program encourages general social-emotional competence and provides specific training in building friendships and responding to bullying.

Emotional intelligence skills include:

- Perspective taking and empathy.
- Managing emotions.

Self-management skills include:

- Risk assessment and decision making.
- Setting and achieving positive goals.

Social skills include:

- Assertive (that is, clear, strong, and respectful) communication.
- Distinguishing intentional hurt from unintentional hurt.
- Conflict resolution.
- Building and maintaining friendships.

### **Academic Skills**

Integration of social-emotional and academic skills helps reduce the time pressures that teachers often encounter in the classroom. Each level of the classroom curriculum contains a complete eleven-lesson skill unit and two seven- to ten-lesson literature units (the teacher chooses which of the two literature units to teach). The skill unit introduces the themes of friendship and bullying in activities that will increase students' competence in oral expression, writing composition, and analytic reasoning. Each literature unit reinforces earlier social skills and incorporates vocabulary enrichment, analyses of literary elements, and text-comprehension strategies. Extension activities provide links to other subjects, such as geography, history, art, and cultural diversity.

### **Positive Social Values**

The *Steps to Respect* program teaches students the skills they need to act responsibly in bullying and other situations. The program also encourages understanding and application of positive social values by appealing to children's empathy, sense of fairness, and desire to have rewarding friendships. It provides the adult support and acknowledgment necessary to encourage positive values, use of new skills, and reinforcement of children's sense of social responsibility. Additionally, it provides a framework for facilitating the adult-student partnership that is crucial to making the program a success.

### **Skill Units for Intermediate Grades**

Teachers in grades 3–5 or 4–6 present lessons about making and keeping friends and handling bullying. Each grade level has its own lessons. Level 1 is taught at grade 3 or 4, Level 2 at grade 4 or 5, and Level 3 at grade 5 or 6.

Each of the first ten skill lessons at each level is divided into three parts, each of which takes 20–30 minutes. The three parts are designed to be taught in the same week. Parts 1 and 2 include introductory discussions and other activities to help engage students by tapping into previous knowledge and experience. Students then investigate concepts and practice skills. Parts 1 and 2 can be combined for one longer teaching session.

Part 3 is an integral part of the lesson. It frequently introduces key lesson concepts and always reinforces those from Parts 1 and 2. Part 3 should be taught two or three days after Part 2.

An eleventh review lesson is also included at the end of each level.

Classroom teachers have the primary responsibility for reinforcing prosocial behaviors and promoting real-life transfer of the skills. Their ability to do this is greatly enhanced if they are also the ones who teach the lessons. If a counselor or other staff member comes into the classroom to present lessons, the classroom teachers should be involved actively in the lesson presentation to ensure student buy-in and later application and transfer of the skills.

Students learn to identify the coercion and inequalities of power that underlie bullying behaviors, including physical harm and intimidation, name-calling, teasing, spreading rumors, and ostracizing classmates. The *Steps to Respect* curriculum also deals with elements of racism, sexual prejudice, and sexual harassment within the context of bullying. This developmentally appropriate approach (Stein, 1995; see references in the Review of Research) to these topics enables all students to tie them to familiar experiences. Level 3 lessons provide teachers with the option of either directly labeling *sexual bullying* and *sexual harassment* or confining their remarks to a more general discussion of the ways people are bullied about their bodies.

More information on the skill units can be found in the Teacher's Guides for each level of the curriculum. These guides are located at the front of the binder of lesson materials for each level.

The scope and sequence of skill lessons for each of the three levels is listed in Resource A, page 91.

### **Literature Units for Intermediate Grades**

The program kit includes two literature units for each grade level. Teachers choose one literature unit to teach after the skill lessons are completed, with the goal of integrating previously learned *Steps to Respect* concepts with literature and other academic subjects. Each unit lists language arts objectives and social-emotional learning objectives. Lessons include vocabulary lists, writing activities, discussions, and creative projects in other subject areas to help students explore healthy friendships further and deal with bullying. Additionally, many of the literature lessons provide opportunities for teachers to address multicultural issues and racism in greater depth.

For details about the literature units, see Resource B, page 92.

### **Literature-Based Lesson for Primary Grades**

An introductory lesson for kindergarten and primary-grade children entitled "Bullying: Knowing What to Do" is included with this guide. The lesson is based on a picture book entitled *Nobody Knew What To Do: A Story About Bullying* by Becky Ray McCain. (Albert Whitman & Company, Morton Grove, Illinois, 2001. ISBN 0-8075-5711-0.) This book is not included with the *Steps to Respect* kit, but can be purchased through any bookseller.

The learning objectives of this lesson are for children to be able to:

- Recognize bullying behaviors.
- Understand that it is important to report bullying to an adult right away.
- Identify adults they can report to or go to for help with bullying problems.

The lesson provides a way for primary-grade teachers to begin to introduce skills of recognizing and reporting bullying. A short skill practice on making a report is included in the lesson.

The full text of the Primary-Grades Lesson is included as Resource C in the Resource Section, page 94.